

High Man Out

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By Paul Jones

THERE were three of them concerned: Wallace, the bookkeeper, Keith, one of the trust officers, and Delaney, cashier. It started back in 1929, when everything looked so simple, and they made money until the bottom dropped out of the world.

It was crooked, of course. They all knew it, but Wallace was a man who never admitted the truth, even to himself. In his mind, the money they took was only borrowed. A quick turn on the market and they could pay it back.

At last they met for a dismal conference in one of the rooms reserved for the holders of safe-deposit boxes.

Wallace sat at one end of the polished rosewood table. At his right, Keith. Opposite him, Delaney.

"We can't cover up on this next inspection," Delaney said. "From now on, any money will be just plain missing. You know what that means."

Wallace wet his lips. "When does the inspector come?"

"I've been tipped off he's coming tomorrow," Delaney bit the end of his cigar. "Anybody got a match?"

Wallace slid his lighter along the table. For a brief moment, Delaney's ruthless face was illumined. He closed the lighter and tossed it back. "There must be some way out," Wallace assured him hopefully.

He saw contempt in Delaney's glance. "Don't be such a boy scout," said the cashier. "We're going to jail. And that's that."

Wallace looked at Keith, who sat cracking his knuckles. A mist of perspiration was gathering in the fuzz of his bald head. "It'll be tough on our wives and kids," Keith murmured.

"Yes, and it'll be tough on us, too," said Delaney. "I'm not looking forward to twenty years in jail."

Wallace started. "Surely you don't think twenty years! Why, after all—"

Delaney ignored him, and turned to Keith, with a hard question in his eyes. "Listen," he said at last, shifting his gaze to Wallace, "I've got an idea that'll save two of us, and keep all of us from going to prison." He took a pack of

cards from his coat pocket. "Here's the idea. We deal cards and the man that loses takes the rap for all of us. We fix up his family."

Wallace stirred uneasily in his chair. "I don't get you. I thought you said none of us would go to prison."

Delaney put a short automatic pistol beside the cards. "That's the answer," he announced brutally. "We cook everything so the blame falls on one man—and he steps out. That settles it. They can't get a dead man on the stand."

WALLACE'S heart beat painfully in the thick silence which followed. "It can't be as bad as all that," he suggested. "Let's wait till tomorrow."

Delaney gave no sign that he had heard him. He was looking at Keith, who brooded over his finger nails. "What do you say?" he insisted.

Keith spoke suddenly: "All right. I'll take a chance if you will."

Delaney took the cards from their case and began to shuffle them. Suspicion grew in Wallace's mind. They were going to fix the deal so that he would be chosen as the scapegoat. "It seems to me—" he began.

"Shut up," Delaney snarled. "You're in this. I'll deal one card around—high man's elected. That all right?"

Wallace, his mind dissolved in a fearful panic, nodded. He looked down the long, shining table, and saw Keith cut the cards. Delaney picked them up, and in that instant Wallace saw the ace of diamonds, the bottom card, mirrored in the gleaming wood.

Delaney flipped out three cards, face down on the table. Wallace put a timid finger on the back of his. "Get this straight," Delaney was saying. "High takes the rap." He turned his card with a quick motion of his hand, and revealed the nine of hearts.

Wallace put his clenched left hand

against his mouth to conceal the chattering of his teeth. His right hand fumbled and turned up the queen of spades. He swallowed painfully, sure that he had been tricked.

Keith was still scrutinizing the design on the back of his card. At last he lifted one corner and peeked under. He sat back, quite still, with his eyes closed.

"Let's see it," Delaney said roughly. He reached across the table and turned up the ace of diamonds. "Tough luck," he said in an odd tone.

WALLACE could not trust himself to speak. He felt infinitely lighter and stronger.

He saw Delaney push the gun over to Keith. "We'll come back tonight, and straighten things out," he was saying. After a pause, he added: "By nine o'clock we ought to be finished."

Keith took off his glasses, and polished them. "Don't bother," he told Delaney, and slipped the gun into his pocket. "I confessed this morning. I'm getting off with two years."

The cashier's face was contorted with rage. "I didn't feel quite right about it," Keith went on pleasantly, "until I saw you deal me that ace from the bottom of the pack." He got up and went around the table to the door. "They're checking up on my story now. We'll be arrested as we leave the bank."

Delaney sprang to his feet, but Keith had gone before he reached the door.

Wallace still sat at the table. His knees were shaking.

"The dirty stool pigeon," Delaney raged.

Wallace looked at him, and derived a curious comfort from the knowledge that he had been wrong, that Keith and Delaney had not been leagued against him.

"I saw you slip him the bottom card," he said. "I—I appreciate it."

Delaney looked down at him. "Why, you dirty little rat," he sneered, "I'd have given it to you in a minute, only I knew you wouldn't have the nerve to go through with it."

Illustrated by
Courtney Allen



COURTNEY
ALLEN

"You're all in this. I'll deal one card around—high man's elected. That all right?"

A Dime a Dozen

By Ray Tucker

Collier's Washington Staff Writer

Bosses are at a discount; the hostility of the Administration and the coming of repeal have driven their stock down to a new low. There are even some people nowadays who don't like to have their babies kissed

THE political bosses are having a hard time of it these days. The rulers of many once-powerful machines—the New York Currys, the Philadelphia Vares, the Pittsburgh Mellons and the Louisiana Longs—sit upon tottering thronelets and wonder how much longer their reigns will last. The flags over hundreds of district club-houses are flapping at half-mast, and the ward-healers are depending for jobs upon the Blue Eagle.

Regardless of party, for the La Follette Progressives of Wisconsin have suffered along with the bipartisan directors of corrupt municipal machines, the old-fashioned type of boss seems to be in bad with voters who can no longer afford these parasitic agencies of public plunder. Their class is in disfavor with a President who entered the White House after a career spent in fighting the prototype of all political corporations—Tammany Hall—and its national allies. It may be the twilight of certain political gods peculiar to the American scene.

Although White House spokesmen deprecate suggestions that the President is interfering in local, partisan contests, pointing out that he depends for eventual success on a government that is coalitionist at least in spirit, Mr. Roosevelt has done more than furnish an example of an anti-boss kind of statesmanship. He has helped, specifically and deliberately, to chase professional politicians from the halls of government. He has raised up new leaders and patronage dispensers in various states to take the place of elders who once stood higher in party councils than he did.

Having an entirely new concept of government, different from that of conservative Democrats, he has asked neither advice nor assistance from party venerables, including some former Cabinet members, governors, senators and past presidential nominees. He has brought in new blood in the form of economic and social experts more familiar with textbooks than platforms, and they may reorganize the American system in such a way that there will be no place for the practicing politician. Economics rather than politics, and realities rather than bunk, have the floor for the moment.

If the Brain Trust realizes its dreams for regimentation of industry, business, agriculture, finance and even social relief, the favors upon which political machines depend for profit and existence—public jobs, franchises, special privileges for the few, preferred treatment for friends, contracts and subsidies and charities—may be placed far beyond the grasp of the boss and his henchmen. In such a society, as Secretary Ickes has declared, there may be no function for

such little brothers of the boss as the "insider" and "fixer" and "the man who has a pull at Washington."

The government, extending its paternalistic reach into many new fields which touch the voter's stomach and pocketbook, may supplant the club-houses, where the boss used to hand out charity and jobs, with scientific services of its own, thereby depriving the politicians of that popular gratitude which in the past has expressed itself by voting the straight and narrow ticket on Election Day.

A Long-Delayed Revolt

But the Administration is not entrusting its anti-boss campaign entirely to the professors. Professor Tugwell may devise an economic and social system that will make the boss a more prehistoric specimen than the dinosaur—or the G. O. P. elephant—but Professor Farley has no such Darwinian patience. He believes in quick and direct action. Despite protestations that he acted on his own initiative in battling Tammany in the recent New York mayoralty election, everybody who understands practical politics realizes that he must have had presidential blessing. "Jim" is too loyal to "the best friend a man ever had" to leap into such a major conflict

out of boyish enthusiasm for a fight, and if he had acted precipitately a word from the President would have checked him.

The people, however, were far ahead of Mr. Farley in leaping on the bosses. Besides throwing Tammany out the window of the City Hall that is modeled after the Doge's Palace in Venice, they defeated the National Chairman's own mayoralty entry in New York, "Holy Joe" McKee, possibly because they believed Fusion arguments that he, too, would bow before a new set of bosses. Despite Mr. McKee's coy cooings for White House support, and Mr. Farley's declaration for him, the people elected Fiorello H. La Guardia, a Progressive Republican, whose whole record portrayed him as a hater of bosses and their breed. Indeed, some of the political overlords whom he has fought most bitterly were Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover.

For the first time in twenty years, the metropolis got mad and smashed Tammany, including past and present and potential allies, with a slogan of "A plague on both your houses." It was resentment at corrupt, costly and inefficient government which did it, quite as much as hope of better things under Mayor-elect La Guardia. It is, I think, extremely significant that his biggest

vote, proportionately, came from home-owning boroughs where people pay direct taxes and know how much Tammany has cost them. It was an economic crusade which, depending upon Mr. La Guardia, may be more than temporary.

The Old Order Passes

The revolt against bossism cracked all party lines, regardless of geography. In "corrupt and contented" Philadelphia and in sooty Pittsburgh, where Vare and Mellon Republicans have ruled the golden roost for so long, it was the Democrats who triumphed. Mr. Vare, ironically, elected only his coroner, while at the other end of the state the Democratic candidates won all along the line in a supposedly impregnable G. O. P. Gibraltar. Here again, it was the anti-vote which accomplished the trick, for the Democrats' registration was only a fraction of their total vote. As in New York, this may be the beginning of the end of the great machines which, when they were not selfishly squabbling, held the Keystone State in their grip. Though less spectacular, the Vare and Mellon setbacks may be more important than Tammany's exile.

It would be foolish and premature, of course, to predict the death of the boss (Continued on page 55)



The power of the bosses is dwindling in the face of new combinations of economic forces